等花干了再摘

爷爷在菜园里种黄瓜，我负责浇水。头一根黄瓜六月初开的花，头上顶着一朵黄的，身子又细又短。

我想摘。手刚伸出去，爷爷按住我：花还没干，再等几天。我问：为什么？爷爷说：摘早了的黄瓜没开花，嘴里发苦；再长几天，肉才脆，才回甜。我问：几天？爷爷说：看花。花干了、掉了，就差不多了。

打那以后我天天去看。花从边上开始干，卷成一小团，颜色转褐。第三天花还没掉，我着急，问爷爷：它是不是不掉了？爷爷说：它在等时候，就像你放学等下课铃，到点它就响。我蹲在架下想，下课铃还有十分钟，我这朵花还有几天，比等下课难熬多了。那天中午我连饭都少吃一碗，惦记着它。

第五天早上，花掉了。黄瓜深绿，身上蒙一层白霜。爷爷把剪子递给我：你来，剪断柄，留卷须，藤上还接着结。我咔的一声剪下来，断口嫩得出水。爷爷接过去看了看断口，点头说：剪得对，没伤着藤。

我举着黄瓜问爷爷：先给谁？爷爷说：你定。我想了一会儿，说：先给李爷爷吧，他上礼拜帮咱挑过水。奶奶拌了一碗凉菜，我端着送到隔壁。李爷爷咬一口，说这黄瓜甜。我说：我等了五天呢。李爷爷放下筷子，认真地跟我说：等过的东西，吃着才知道等是什么滋味。我不太懂这句话，但把它记住了。

回来爷爷也给我们切了一碗。我咬一大口，确实是脆的，咽下去一会儿，嘴里泛上一点甜。原来等待是有味道的。

爷爷坐在竹椅上，看着那架黄瓜，慢悠悠说：园子里长的东西，跟嘴里的东西一样，等一等，都好吃。我把这句话记在心里，第二天一早，又跑去数第二根黄瓜头上的花了。

Wait Until the Flower Dries

Grandpa planted cucumbers in the garden, and I was in charge of watering. The first cucumber flowered in early June, a yellow flower on its head, its body thin and short.

I wanted to pick it. My hand was barely out when Grandpa held it back: the flower has not dried, wait a few more days. I asked: why? Grandpa said: a cucumber picked early has no bloom settled in it, it tastes bitter; let it grow a few more days and the flesh turns crisp, and sweet after that. I asked: how many days? Grandpa said: watch the flower. When it dries and falls off, it is about time.

From then on I went to look every day. The flower dried from the edges, curled into a small ball, its color turning brown. On the third day it had not fallen, and I worried and asked Grandpa: will it not fall? Grandpa said: it is waiting for its

time, just like you wait for the bell at the end of school; when the time comes, it rings. I squatted under the frame and thought: the school bell has ten minutes to go, but my flower has how many days left; this is harder to wait out than a school day. That noon I ate a bowl less of rice, my mind back on the flower.

On the morning of the fifth day the flower fell off. The cucumber was deep green, with a coat of white frost on its body. Grandpa handed me the scissors: you do it. Cut the stem, leave the tendril, and the vine keeps bearing. I snipped once, and the cut was so tender it gave out water. Grandpa looked at the cut and nodded: cut right, the vine is unhurt.

Holding the cucumber I asked Grandpa: who first? Grandpa said: you decide. I thought a while and said: let us give it to Grandpa Li first, he helped us carry water last week. Grandma made a bowl of cold salad, and I carried it next door. Grandpa Li took a bite and said: this cucumber is sweet. I said: I waited five days for it. Grandpa Li put down his chopsticks and said to me seriously: a thing you have waited for tells you, in the eating, what waiting tastes like. I did not quite understand the line, but I kept it.

Back home Grandpa had cut a bowl for us too. I took a big bite; crisp indeed, and a while after swallowing, a little sweetness rose in the mouth. So waiting has a taste of its own.

Grandpa sat on the bamboo chair, looking at the cucumber frame, and said slowly: what grows in a garden, like what goes into a mouth, always tastes better after waiting. I kept that line in my heart, and early the next morning I ran again to count the flower on the second cucumber.